

Patrika

Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles

DECEMBER 2014

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Over Thirty Years Of Service To Humanity



Upcoming Events

Valmiki Ramayan Discourse Series by Swami Ishwarananda	Jan 5-9	6:30 am - 7:30 am 7:30 pm - 8:30 pm
<i>Special Kalarjali Event:</i> Screening of Movie "Chittagong"	Jan 10	7:00 pm - 10:00 pm
CHYK Class: Break the Bondage with Swami Ishwarananda	Jan 14	7:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Rameshwaram Fifth Anniversary	Jan 17	8:00 am - 12:00 pm
Bhagavad Gita Chapter IV Discourse by Swami Ishwarananda	Every Sunday	9:00 am - 10:15 am 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm
Fundamentals of Vedanta Lectures by Acharya Mahadevanji	Every Sunday	9:00 am - 10:15 am 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm
Guided Vedic Chanting by Swami Ishwarananda	Every Saturday	6:30 am - 7:30 am
Mahashivaratri Celebrations	February 17	
<i>Program details will be available on website soon</i>		

****Announcing Date****
Bhagavad Gita Chanting International
Competition (Chapter 15): CMLA Prelims
[Details available on website](#)

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Thus Spake The Master

*Leave the idols alone. Turn inwards. Reach the silence.
Burst into it and scale the heights to arrive at the depths of that which is all these.
Taste it and be silent within.
When full, there shall be no blabberings, no words.
Meet me there.*

- Swami Chinmayananda

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Words Of The Wise

In success, we should have humility, and in failure the enthusiasm to go ahead.

- Swami Tejomayananda

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THINK!

Freedom

*"Think yourself as free, you will be free
Think yourself bound, you will remain bound..."*

*Says Sage Ashtavakra to Janaka
All that helps you to think free is samsara
That which does not is...samsara!*

- Swami Ishwarananda

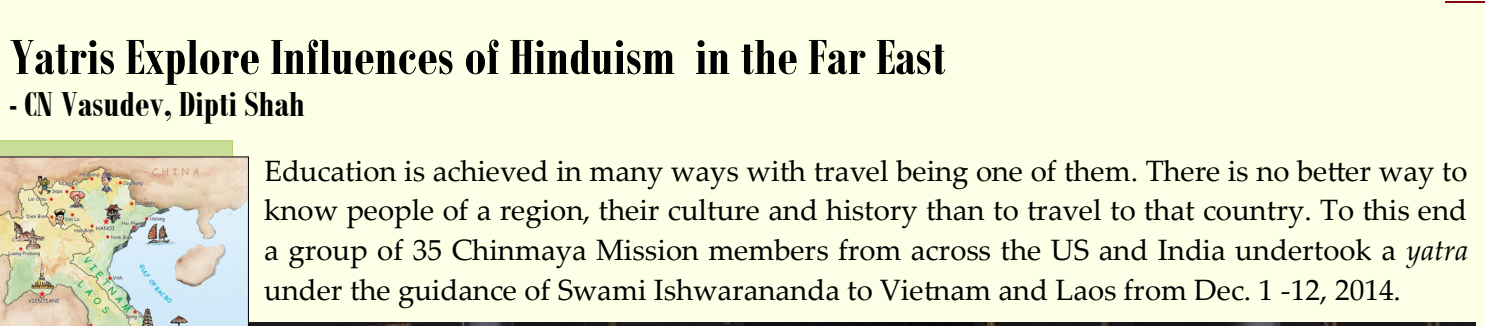
For e-Satsang blog, click [here](#)

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2015 Ushered in With Stirring Bhajans and Silent Meditation

Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles members gathered together at Rameshwaram to usher in 2015 with chanting, bhajans and silent meditation.

The evening began with Guru Smaranam and realizing His importance in our lives. The group chanted Guru Paduka Stotram, Gurudev's ashtottra Namavali and Tapovan shatakam. Everyone also joined in enthusiastically and with reverence to chant the name of the Lord. The temple soon reverberated with the holy words of the 'Vishnu Sahasranama.' Earlier that evening, the entire eighteen chapters of Bhagavad Gita and some parts of 'Rudram' had been chanted in the temple.



The bhajan satsang that followed by Ashwin and Laxmi – the very same artists who had previously enthralled the audience with their magical renderings at Sevanjali 2014 – once again captivated. They started with Guru Brahma, followed by Om Namō Narayanaya, Shriram Narayana, Chilangai Katti, Hey Radhika, Bolo Narayana, Govinda Gopala, Shiram Jayaram, Shri Krishna Sharanam Mama, Om Namah Shivaya. They had everyone humming and singing along till 11:40 pm.



At this point and close to the midnight hour, Swami Ishwarananda led those present into silent meditation for twenty minutes. He concluded with a message for all to try and remain in total silence for at least fifteen minutes every day. Said Swamiji "In this New Year, may you constantly strive to recognize the silent observer in yourself, knowing whom alone one attains permanent happiness".

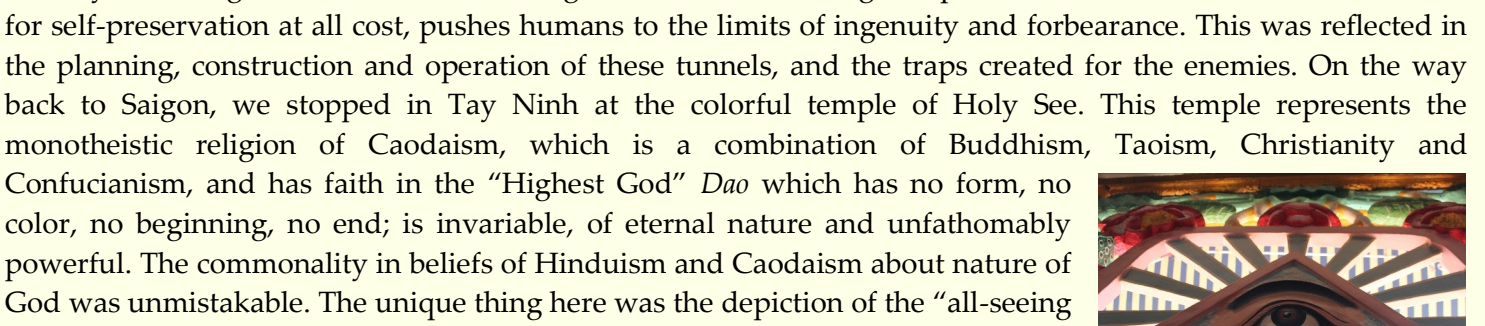
At the stroke of midnight, everyone sang the Mangal Aarti and took Swamiji's blessings with prasad.

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Yatris Explore Influences of Hinduism in the Far East

- CN Vasudev, Dipti Shah

Education is achieved in many ways with travel being one of them. There is no better way to know people of a region, their culture and history than to travel to that country. To this end a group of 35 Chinmaya Mission members from across the US and India undertook a *yatra* under the guidance of Swami Ishwarananda to Vietnam and Laos from Dec. 1 -12, 2014.

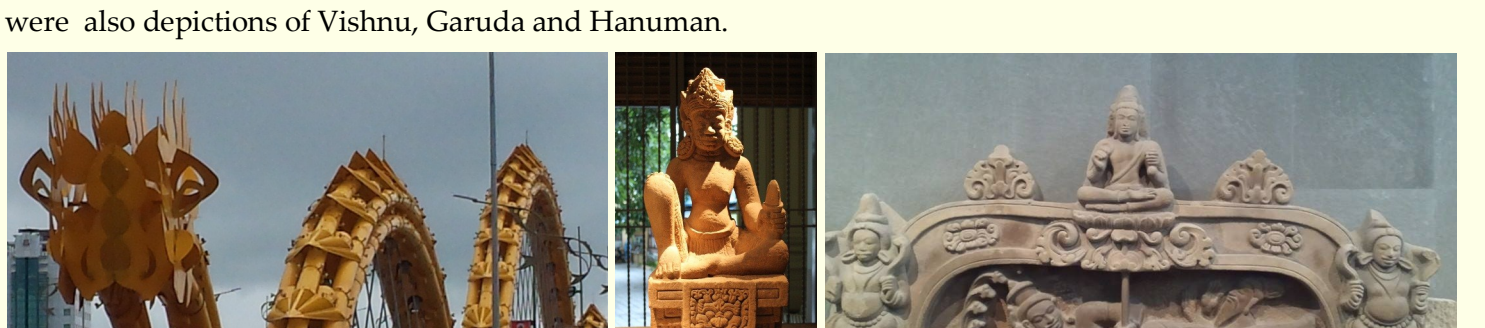


Both these countries are steeped in Buddhism with the influence of Hinduism clearly evident. For most of us, our impression of these countries was through the colored glasses of the deadly war during the 60s. However, after 12 days of travel we all returned with a better understanding of this part of the world.



The *yatra* started on Dec.1 in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) Vietnam, bustling with what seemed like an army of two-wheelers like we had never seen before! Swarming with people, the Binh Tay Wholesale Market had more to showcase and sell than the eyes could absorb! Most of us felt very rich due to the exchange rate of 1 US \$ = 21,000 dong. This was short lived as a cup of coffee was 150,000 dong! The next 3 days were in hot and humid South Vietnam. Most of the sites in Saigon were intimately connected to the revolutionary war.

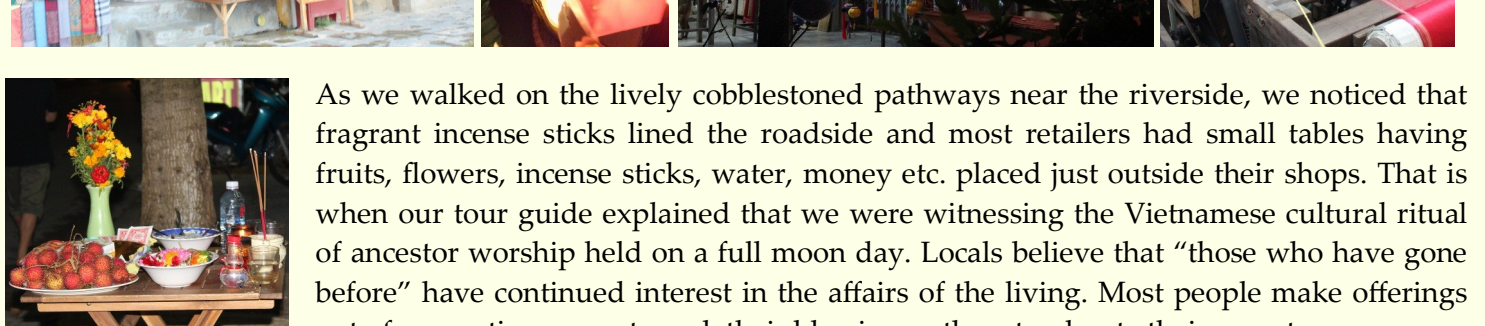
The visit to the Revolutionary Museum was a very sobering experience and a great example of man's inhumanity to man. The strong French influence in the city's architecture was unmistakable since Saigon was once the capital of the French colony in Vietnam and had been called "Paris of the East".



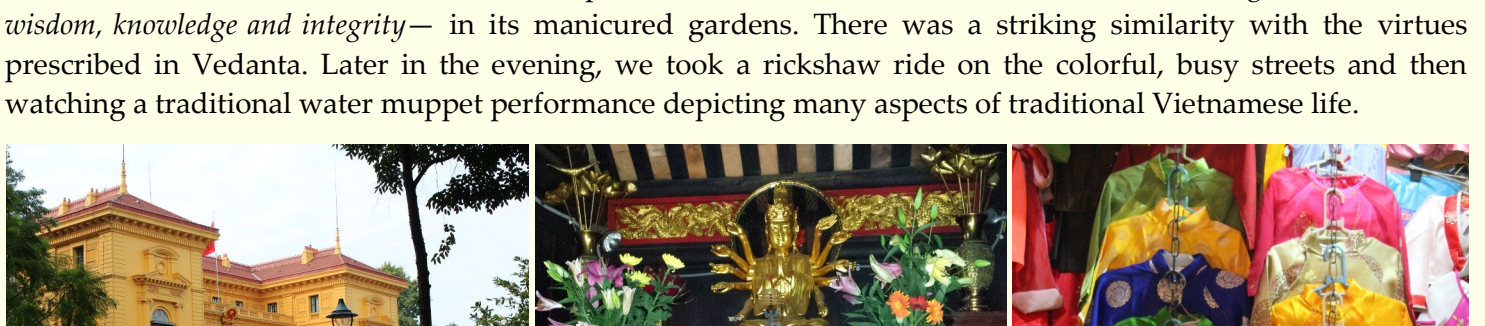
The Thien Han temple and Quan Am pagoda were great architectural gems. A unique sight we saw was of numerous cone-shaped incense sticks hanging from the roof of the temple, which are lit by devotees offering a prayer or wish in mind. The incense stick burns for a week! The highlight of Saigon was the AO Show in the Opera House displaying Vietnamese gymnastic skills.

The next day we went to the Cu Chi tunnel complex, a labyrinth of three-levels of narrow underground tunnels built by the war guerillas named Viet Cong to hide from and stage surprise attacks on the US forces. The need for self-preservation at all cost, pushes humans to the limits of ingenuity and forbearance. This was reflected in the planning, construction and operation of these tunnels, and the traps created for the enemies. On the way back to Saigon, we stopped in Tay Ninh at the colorful temple of Holy See. This temple represents the monotheistic religion of Cao daism, which is a combination of Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Confucianism, and has faith in the "Highest God" Dao which has no form, no color, no beginning, no end; is invariable, of eternal nature and unfathomably powerful. The commonality in beliefs of Hinduism and Daoism about nature of God was unmistakable. The unique thing here was the depiction of the "all-seeing eye", also known as the "Eye of Providence" in cultural iconography of 17th and 18th centuries, used to represent the constant presence and watchfulness of God. Interestingly, this symbol also appears on the U.S. one dollar bill.

Dec. 4 was spent at the Mekong Delta. We rode the row boats through thick vegetation, enjoyed the scenery, visited a candy-making factory and a honey farm, appreciated local art, tasted local teas and enjoyed homegrown fruits and cultural music amidst resounding laughter.

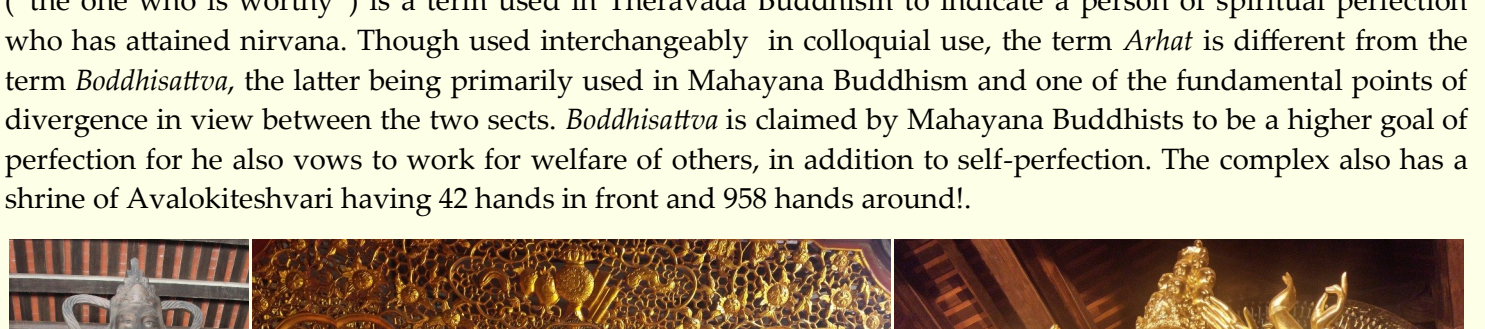


The next morning we flew out to Saigon to Da Nang in central Vietnam and visited the Cham Museum located just next to the "Dragon Bridge". Dragons are considered auspicious in the Orient and hence their presence is felt in many places. The museum showcased exceptional carvings and statues of the Hindu pantheon sculpted during the Champa dynasty, dating back to 500 to 1500 AD. The Champa dynasty had their faith in Lord Shiva and that explained the large number of sculptural relics of Shiva lingam, statues of Parvati and Ganesha. There were also depictions of Vishnu, Garuda and Hanuman.



Early morning of Dec 6, after the night at Hoi An, Swamiji led guided meditation by the beach. It was time to center ourselves amidst the hectic pace of the *yatra*. Later in the morning, we visited My Son to see the extraordinary Siva Temple ruins from the Cham Dynasty dating back to the 4th century AD. Formerly the religious capital of the Cham kingdom, My Son is now a UNESCO world heritage site with over 20 preserved monuments that were used by the Cham kings. The uniqueness of these temples was the fact that they did not use mortar or any binding agent between the bricks and still these temples have stood the test of time.

That evening we had a walking tour of Hoi An. We visited a 400-year covered Japanese bridge, a Chinese temple, a silk factory and were lucky to take part in the lantern festival that takes place only once a month. We floated beautiful paper lanterns with candles down the river which was a gorgeous sight.

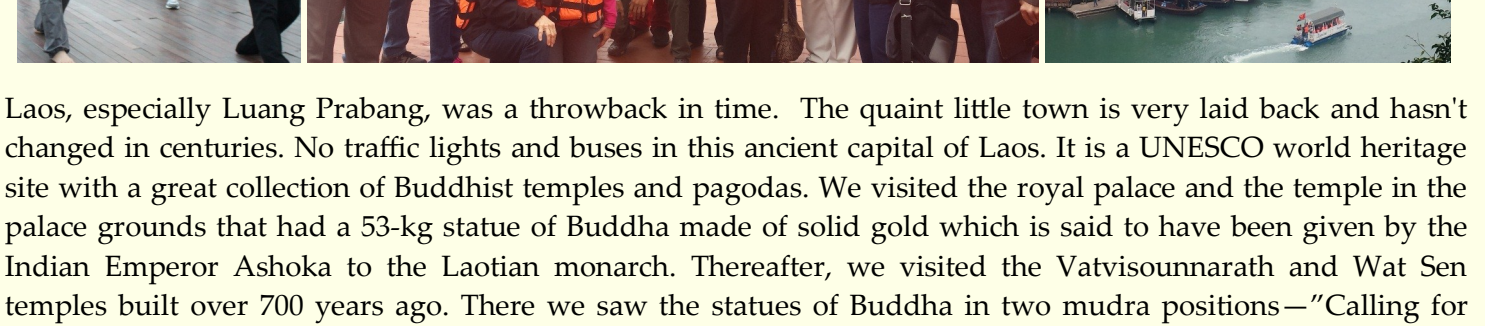


As we walked on the lively cobblestoned pathways near the riverside, we noticed that fragrant incense sticks lined the roadside and most retailers had small tables having fruits, flowers, incense sticks, water, money etc. placed just outside their shops. That is when our tour guide explained that we were witnessing the Vietnamese cultural ritual of ancestor worship held on a full moon day. Locals believe that "those who have gone before" have continued interest in the affairs of the living. Most people make offerings out of veneration, some to seek their blessings, others to placate their ancestors.

Next, we headed north the following day to Hanoi. The Ho Chi Minh memorial was an imposing structure and houses "Uncle Ho's" embalmed body and the Governor's Mansion was reverberant of French colonial architecture. It was an eye-opener to see such deep-rooted regard for the political leader amongst every Vietnamese that we interacted with. We then proceeded to see the One Pillar Pagoda built by the first emperor of the Ly dynasty after he dreamt of communication with Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Mercy. Thereafter we visited the first University of Vietnam called "Temple of Literature" which has taught Confucianism for centuries and had floral representation of its five basic tenets—*humaneness, righteousness, moral wisdom, knowledge and integrity*— in its manicured gardens. There was a striking similarity with the virtues prescribed in Vedanta. Later in the evening, we took a rickshaw ride on the colorful, busy streets and then watching a traditional water puppet performance depicting many aspects of traditional Vietnamese life.



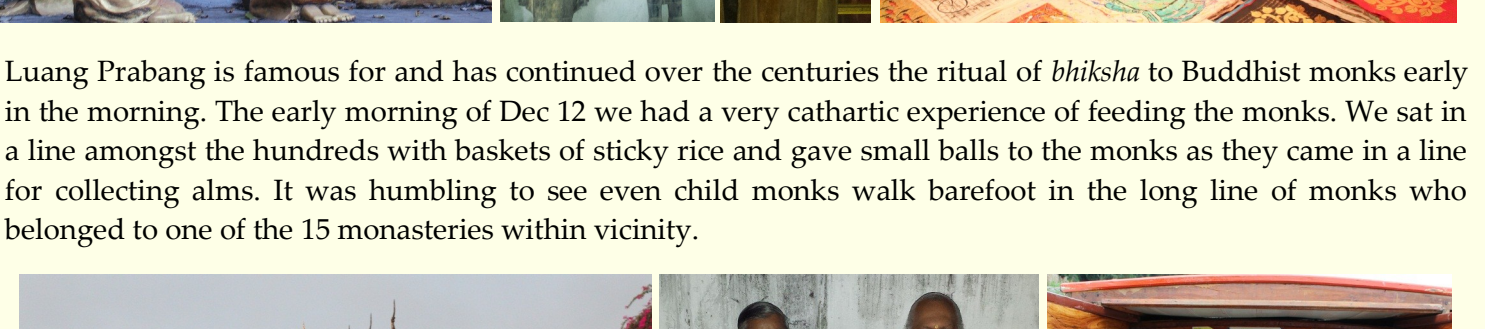
The Bai Dinh pagoda, which we visited the next day, was an architectural marvel built to celebrate the 1,000th anniversary of Hanoi. This pagoda is the largest in Asia with the tallest and heaviest (100 ton) bronze depiction of Buddha. Interestingly, just past the entrance itself are large bronze statues of *dvarapalas* (protective deities), Ho Phap—one of which rewards good conduct and the other punishes evil deeds, thus helping create the balance of *punya* and *papa*! The complex has a 4.3 km long corridor has many beautifully carved lattice overhangs and is lined with 500 life-size statues of *Arhat* in various postures depicting earthly life. An *Arhat* ("the one who is worthy") is a term used in Theravada Buddhism to indicate a person of spiritual perfection who has attained nirvana. Though used interchangeably in colloquial use, the term *Arhat* is different from the term *Bodhisattva*, the latter being primarily used in Mahayana Buddhism and one of the fundamental points of divergence in view between the two sects. *Bodhisattva* is claimed by Mahayana Buddhists to be a higher goal of perfection for he also vows to work for welfare of others, in addition to self-perfection. The complex also has a shrine of Avalokiteshvari having 42 hands in front and 958 hands around!



We experienced the natural beauty of the North when we drove in our bus to the staging point of Ha Long Bay on Dec 9. The experience of cruising the bay among the hundreds of sheer limestone cliffs jutting out of the sea was wonderful. We paid a rowing boat visit to the "floating villages" of the fishermen and their families; and saw the pearl culture farm. Some of us also enjoyed kayaking in these waters. Next morning, we refreshed our bodies and mind with a session of Tai Chi, followed by a meditation session led by Swamiji, then visited the gigantic stalactite and stalagmite caves which was yet another work of art by nature.



Laos, especially Luang Prabang, was a throwback in time. The quaint little town is very laid back and hasn't changed in centuries. No traffic lights and buses in this ancient capital of Laos. It is a UNESCO world heritage site with a great collection of Buddhist temples and pagodas. We visited the royal palace and the temple in the palace grounds that had a 53-kg statue of Buddha made of solid gold which is said to have been given by the Indian Emperor Ashoka to the Laotian monarch. Thereafter, we visited the Vatvisounnarath and Wat Sen temples built over 700 years ago. There we saw the statues of Buddha in two mudra positions—"Calling for Rain" and "Cease Fighting or Peace". Later that morning we went to the gorgeous Kuang Si falls where the waters tumbled over a multi-tiered rock limestone formation into turquoise colored pools of water. Many of us later climbed Mount Phou Si to see many more Buddhas (sitting, standing, in repose). After sunset, we visited the roadside "night market" set up by the local artists and artisans. It was a two-mile long colorful display of artwork and handicrafts.



Luang Prabang is famous for and has continued over the centuries the ritual of *bhiksha* to Buddhist monks early in the morning. The early morning of Dec 12 we had a very cathartic experience of feeding the monks. We sat in a line amongst the hundreds with baskets of sticky rice and gave small balls to the monks as they came in a line for collecting alms. It was humbling to see even child monks walk barefoot in the long line of monks who belonged to one of the 15 monasteries within vicinity.



Later that morning we took the 2 hour boat ride on the Mekong River to see 2,000 year old Pak Ou Cave which houses thousands of Buddhas of all shapes and sizes in many different positions including meditation, teaching, peace, rain, and reclining (nirvana). Legend has it that locals come here once a year and leave a Buddha when they pray for a wish to happen.

Early morning Dec. 13 saw the yatri group take flights out – to India, back home to the US or to other parts of SE Asia. Overall the trip not only widened our horizons about cultures of far east countries but also helped us see the influence of Hinduism in their local beliefs and religion.

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Let Go and Let God

'Let Go and Let God', said Acharya Mahadevanji to the assembled earnest learners at the monthly satsang held in Cypress on Nov 21, 2014.

Through parables, Mahadevanji highlighted the idea of letting go of the lower to hold on to the higher to stay in the eye of the storm and not be tossed about. Letting go we renounce Raga and Dvesha, and direct the BMI inward. The audience was reminded of Arjuna's predicament at the battlefield upon seeing his relatives whom he was to conquer; he needed the wisdom of Lord Krishna to help him harness inner strength to uphold Dharma, renouncing his ego. Quoting generously from the evergreen Gita, Mahadevanji stressed the point that only when we surrender to the Lord can He truly help us. Then only do we ascend the Ladder of Achievement, like 'the little engine that could'.

By keeping in mind always, the principles of Simplicity, Presence and Non-pretentiousness, we can stay centered in the eye of the storm. We must be aware of the three 'I's' present at all times he reiterated: the first 'I' which is the Real I; the second 'I' that thinks I am the (BMI); and the third 'I' that I package, and present to the world.

Letting go of false values, and heading towards Acharya Upasana, and selflessness, we must become true Sevaks, Mahadevanji said. Manava-Seva is Madhava-Seva, the audience was assured.

Other inspiring and poignant thoughts were also shared with the listeners for reflection:

- *Temper gets us in trouble, Pride keeps us there. We must renounce both!
- *Reflect and respond; never react
- *Let go of pessimism, welcome opportunity in every difficulty.
- *Engage in Ram-Naam. Form follows name like servant follows the master.
- *Once you realize the lord within, it doesn't matter where you are, you are HOME.

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Please send articles and pictures for publication to Nimmi Raghunathan at nimnicmla@gmail.com

Many thanks for this issue to:
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